

Confusion dissipates in latest JFK theory

WASHINGTON — For the past few days I've been reading Gerald Posner's "Case Closed," a new book that suggests a truly incredible solution to the Jack Kennedy assassination.

Posner's thesis is so novel, so unexpected and so finely detailed that it forces you to rethink everything you know — not just about the assassination, but about our society today.

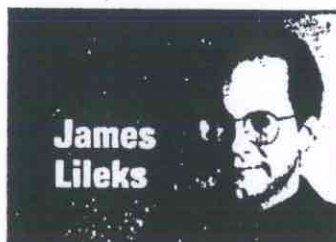
His thesis: A pathetic little wife-beating sociopath named Lee Harvey Oswald plugged the president with absolutely no help from anyone.

Speaking as a recovering idiot, I buy it.

In the past, I have indulged in conspiracy theories, as it was the thing to do in my teen-age years. Part of adolescence, after all, is rejecting what you have been told. You realize that there is no permanent record following you around since grade school; that things do not necessarily go better with Coke, gin in particular; and most important, that there is no hair on your palms. What else did they lie about? You wonder.

So when someone tells you that JFK was perforated by an evil cabal made up of the Mafia, the CIA, the Cubans, the Masons, Amway, the American Kennel Club, the Vienna Boys Choir and two members of the Cowsills, you figure: hey, sure.

The lure of a conspiracy is strong. Some say we simply cannot accept that one single man can bring down a president. I have no trouble believing that, particularly when you look at Perot.



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Others cite tantalizing inconsistencies in the testimony of the day's events. But that seems normal: A day after my wedding, I was hard pressed to describe the precise sequence of events, although I was definitely there. I remember that after the vows people seemed to run toward the grassy knoll where we had set up the bar, rather than toward the altar, which is the direction from which the vows originated. And then there were those three hobos in the receiving line. (They later turned out to be college friends.)

When Oliver Stone's "JFK" came out, I was still susceptible to conspiracy theories. The movie, however, struck me as dank sweaty fantasy, cleverly edited and handsomely filmed. Its message — that fascist elements of the government staged a coup d'etat — was just the sort of paranoid bilge spouted by oily-haired, bad-smelling lunatics who spend all day at the library writ-

ing margin-free manifestoes to their local newspaper.

That's nonsense, I thought. Stone is a fool.

Doesn't he know the Mafia did it?

To the average confused and credulous citizen such as myself, "Case Closed" is refreshing. Posner's exact and thorough destruction of the conspiracy theorists gives you Oswald the man, not Oswald the brilliant secret agent or Oswald the hapless pat-

sy. You watch this loser thrash his way through life, ankle-deep in reality and drowning nevertheless, and you understand him, his motivations. You realize that belief in conspiracies is a failure of imagination. To believe in vast evil machinations is easy; to apprehend how an individual is twisted and driven requires more understanding of the world and the soul, not less.

Well, sez me, anyway. Now that I have switched sides, I expect to be held in scorn by a whole different set of people.

Naturally, hard-core conspiracy buffs will not be dissuaded, and are already at work demolishing the book. They will point out that Posner doesn't address the fact that Oswald was not only nowhere near Dallas, he was appearing in disguise as Topo Gigio on the Ed Sullivan show, and that a 1952 CIA file titled "TopGig" proves this.

You see the process going on with the assassination documents recently released for public scrutiny — the very fact that the documents reveal nothing is proof that something happened. The conspiracy buffs find formerly classified documents titled BIG SCREAMING OBVIOUS OSWALD-CIA CONNECTION and read them eagerly, only to discover the text consists of "Yeah, right. Nothing to it." Ah hah! Yo ho! That settles it! They admit there was a connection! Then they deny it! Of course! That's what they do!

Remember, if no one hears a tree fall in the forest, it doesn't mean it didn't fall.

It just means that the loggers were CIA.